



Reach for the Stars

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Introduction

The historical contributions Muslims have made in pre-modern civilisations and academia are undisputed. From the advent of Islām to the ‘golden age’, such contributions are undoubtedly acknowledged and well-revered. Take, for example: Abū ‘Alī Ibn Sīnā ؑ (known as Avicenna in the western world), who heavily contributed to logic, philosophy and medicine;⁽¹⁾ and Abū ‘l-Walīd Ibn Rushd al-Qurṭubī ؑ (known as Averroës), who earned the title ‘the commentator’ in the medieval west.⁽²⁾

However, little is it known that the great achievements Muslims have made did not end in the bygone era. In fact, there are numerous Muslims even today who have achieved their goals. To quote the Messenger of Allāh ﷺ:

«إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَتَبَ الْإِحْسَانَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ»

“Indeed, Allāh has written professionalism in everything.”⁽³⁾

This profound teaching, from the very greatest contributor to the set foot on the earth ﷺ, demonstrates the diversity this dynamic dīn of Islām advocates. This ḥadīth teaches the believers to acquire full proficiency in whichever field they wish to pursue. Provided the field is lawful, Islām does not prevent its adherents from mastering other arts and sciences – whether in terms of academia, technology or even sport.

In the well-known story of Sayyidunā Yūsuf ؑ, the Qur’ān describes to its readers how his brothers requested their father, Sayyidunā Ya‘qūb ؑ, for permission to go out for a picnic and engage in leisure and recreational activities. The Qur’ān reads:

﴿أَرْسِلْهُ مَعَنَا غَدًا يَرْتَعْ وَيَلْعَبْ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ﴾

“Send him with us tomorrow; he will eat and play; and, of course, we will look after him.”⁽⁴⁾

⁽¹⁾ Al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, 25 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assat al-Risālah, 1405/1985), ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūt, vol. 17 pp. 531-537.

⁽²⁾ Al-Dhahabī, Muḥammad b. Aḥmad, *Siyar A‘lām al-Nubalā’*, 25 vols. (Beirut: Mu’assat al-Risālah, 1405/1985), ed. Shu‘ayb al-Arna’ūt, vol. 21 pp. 307-310. See also, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Averroes.aspx> (accessed on 21th January 2016).

⁽³⁾ Muslim (1955).

⁽⁴⁾ [Yūsuf: 12/12].

This and the following verses illustrate the permissibility of sports in Islām. The *Sharāh* does not discourage them. Needless to say, this is on the condition that everything is kept within its boundaries. In another chapter of the Qur’ān, Allāh ﷻ praised businessmen – the ones who do not compromise their *dīn* in pursuing their dreams. He says:

﴿رَجَالٌ لَا تُلِهِم مِّبْرَةٌ وَلَا يَبِيعُ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَإِقَامِ الصَّلَاةِ وَإِيتَاءِ الزَّكَاةِ يَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا تَتَقَلَّبُ فِيهِ الْقُلُوبُ
وَالْأَبْصَارُ ۝ ٣٧﴾

“The men whom no trade or sale makes neglectful of the remembrance of Allāh, establishing ṣalāh and paying zakāh; they are fearful of a day in which the hearts and eyes will be overturned.”⁽⁵⁾

This balance, between being proficient in an art and not compromising the *dīn*, has been sanctioned by the Prophet ﷺ himself. In one *ḥadīth*, the Prophet ﷺ rewarded Salamah Ibn al-Akwa’ ﷺ after him having chased and successfully caught up to a man riding a camel.⁽⁶⁾ With regard to his *dīn*, Allāh ﷻ has declared about all companions of the Prophet ﷺ:

﴿وَالسَّابِقُونَ السَّابِقُونَ أُولَئِكَ الْمُقَدَّمُونَ وَالْأَنْصَارُ وَالَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُمْ بِإِحْسَانٍ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَأَعَدَّ لَهُمْ
جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ۝ ٣٠﴾

“As for the first and foremost of the Emigrants (Muhājirūn) and the Supporters (Anṣār) and those who follow them in goodness, Allāh is pleased with them and they are pleased with Him; and He has prepared for them gardens beneath which rivers flow, where they will live forever. That is the supreme achievement.”⁽⁷⁾

Sports

Keeping up the profound legacy of Islāmic professionalism, Muhammad Ali demonstrated his Allāh-given skills to the entire world; due to which he became popularly known as ‘the greatest of all time’ – at least, in boxing. Despite his fame, Ali did not forget his duties as a Muslim: he has travelled to numerous countries to help those in need.⁽⁸⁾ Even in his old age, when suffering from Parkinson’s Disease, Ali does not failed to speak the truth where needed.⁽⁹⁾

A similar example can be taken from Yaya Toure. A devout Muslim and skilled footballer, Toure forfeited his man-of-the-match prize, despite being the most

⁽⁵⁾ [Al-Nūr: 24/37].

⁽⁶⁾ Muslim (1754).

⁽⁷⁾ [Tawbah: 9/100].

⁽⁸⁾ <http://www.biography.com/people/muhammad-ali-9181165#boxing-comeback> (accessed on 21st January 2016).

⁽⁹⁾ See <http://www.cbc.ca/sports/olympics/summer/generic/muhammad-ali-responds-donald-trump-call-ban-muslims-1.3358366> (accessed on 21st January 2016).

obvious choice for the honour. His honour only increased when responding to the offer of champagne by saying, “I don’t drink alcohol because I am a Muslim, so you keep it.”⁽¹⁰⁾ As Allāh ﷻ proclaims:

﴿وَلِلَّهِ الْعِزَّةُ وَلِرَسُولِهِ وَلِلْمُؤْمِنِينَ﴾

“And to Allah belongs the honour, and to his Messenger and to the believers.”⁽¹¹⁾

This is further solidified by the statements of Mesut Özil, another footballer, who said:

“I’m a religious person. I grew up like that with my family. For me it is important that I pray. I pray on the pitch. I’m not doing this to show people I am Muslim, or that I’m a believer, I do it for myself. It’s about my faith.” He also said: *“At Arsenal, all the team give me respect. They respect my religion. I respect their religions.”⁽¹²⁾*

When required to attend to the field in the month of Ramaḍān, such Muslim footballers do not compromise their fasts. In fact, Amr Zaki is on record as saying:

“The manager Steve Bruce said to me that he understands my fast but he can’t let me play while I’m fasting. He told me that I have to choose. I chose fasting but then I played several matches without telling him that I’m fasting and I also kept playing well without problems.”⁽¹³⁾

Academia

A contemporary Muslim scientist, Muftī Zameelur Rahman, has honourable credentials in both secular and religious fields. Graduating from the University of Cambridge, Muftī Zameel has numerous articles and books published online, in English and Arabic.⁽¹⁴⁾ Among his scientific writings is his critical analysis of the biological theory of evolution.⁽¹⁵⁾

⁽¹⁰⁾ See <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-2140363/Yaya-Toure-turns-MOTM-champagne-religious-grounds.html> and <http://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/0/football/23159023> (accessed on 21st January 2016).

⁽¹¹⁾ [Al-Munāfiqūn: 68/8].

⁽¹²⁾ See <http://www.101greatgoals.com/blog/arsenals-mesut-ozil-talks-about-modelling-his-game-on-zinedine-zidane-being-muslim-playing-barca-times/> (accessed on 21st January 2016).

⁽¹³⁾ See <http://www.goal.com/en-gb/news/2871/special/2011/08/27/2637353/my-manager-told-me-to-choose-between-fasting-or-playing-i> (accessed on 21st January 2016).

⁽¹⁴⁾ See his website <http://darulmaarif.com/> for English articles and books. Many articles are also available on <https://www.deoband.org/>. For Arabic, see <https://barelwism.wordpress.com/2015/10/22/%D9%85%D8%B3%D8%A3%D9%84%D8%A9-%D8%A5%D9%85%D9%83%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83%D8%B0%D8%A8-%D9%88%D9%85%D9%88%D9%82%D9%81-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%85%D8%A7%D8%A1-%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%A8%D9%86%D8%AF-%D9%85/> (accessed on 21st January 2016).

⁽¹⁵⁾ Available on <http://ahlussunnah.boards.net/thread/301/theory-biological-evolution-islam> (accessed on 21st January 2016).

Cooking/Bakery

The winner of the Great British Bake Off, Nadiya Hussain continuously donned the *hijāb* throughout her participation in the televised competition. As her winning words show,⁽¹⁶⁾ Hussain remained humble and modest throughout the journey. As the Prophet ﷺ said:

«وما تواضع أحدٌ لله إلا رفعه الله»

“No one adopts humility for the sake of Allāh except that Allāh elevates him/her.”⁽¹⁷⁾

Motivation

Muhammad Zulfikar Rakhmat, a journalist by profession, is physically disabled. Born in Indonesia, Rakhmat worked his way to acquiring a B.A. from Qatar University and an M.A. from the University of Manchester, UK. Using his professional skills as a journalist (in his writings for Huffington Post and other websites), Rakhmat does not allow his disability to be a hindrance in his goals. Rather, he uses this as a ‘blessing in disguise’ to educate the world, in writing and oral lectures, about the reality of disability, and how Islām beautifully accommodates for the disabled community.⁽¹⁸⁾

Conclusion

All of the above are living examples of Muslims contributing to the world, without feeling the need to compromise any injunction of *Sharīʿah*. While it is not prohibited to excel in secular arts, one must remember to not forget Allāh ﷻ along the process. As Allāh ﷻ says:

﴿فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ وَاشْكُرُوا لِي وَلَا تَكْفُرُونِ ١٠٢﴾

“So, remember Me; I will remember you. Be thankful to Me, and do not be ungrateful to Me.”⁽¹⁹⁾

In contrast to this, Allāh ﷻ says:

﴿نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ هُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ٦٧﴾

⁽¹⁶⁾ See <http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2015/oct/08/great-british-bake-off-nobel-prize-acceptance-speeches-nadiya-hussain> (accessed on 21st January 2016).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Muslim (2588).

⁽¹⁸⁾ See http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/muhammad-zulfikar-rakhmat/muhammad-disability_b_6851444.html (accessed on 21st January 2016). Some of his motivational lectures are available to watch on <http://ahlussunnah.boards.net/thread/179/why-admire-muhammad-disability-perspective> (accessed on 21st January 2016). To read my own article on the concept of disability in Islām, see <http://ahlussunnah.boards.net/thread/128/accommodation-disabled> (accessed on 21st January 2016).

⁽¹⁹⁾ [Al-Baqarah: 2/152].

“They forgot Allāh, so He forgot them. Surely, the hypocrites are the sinners.”⁽²⁰⁾

A Muslim, in whichever profession he wishes to pursue, must endeavour to be among the first category, not the second. May Allāh ﷻ enable all Muslims to reach their ambitions, remembering Him at every step of the journey. *Āmīn*.

⁽²⁰⁾ [Al-Tawbah: 9/67].